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Ecclesiological Implications of the Approval of the Heretical Document the Toronto Statement by the Pseudo-Council of Crete

By Dr. Mihai-Silviu Chirilă, Theologian, May 19th, 2017

Introduction by Subdeacon Nektarios, M.A.



This article, authored by Dr. Mihai-Silviu Chirilă, a lay theologian and member of the non-commemorator movement in Romania, examines how the False Council of Crete in 2016 amounted to nothing less than the synodal adoption of heresy. Dr. Chirilă meticulously explores the issues surrounding the World Council of Churches, the Council of Crete, and the manner in which these "official" churches formally embraced the heresy of ecumenism. This was achieved through their endorsement of the Toronto Statement, which advocates the existence of an *Ecclesia Extra Ecclesiam*—a "church outside the Church"—whose members are deemed *Aliquo Modo* (in some way) part of the Church of Christ.


Such an assertion stands in direct opposition to Orthodox ecclesiology and constitutes a profound betrayal of Holy Orthodoxy by the local church signatories. It represents the official adoption of the heretical "branch theory," which falsely posits that various Christian denominations are branches of the one Church.

The following local churches approved the adoption of this heretical branch theory:

- Patriarchate of Constantinople
- Patriarchate of Alexandria
- Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Patriarchate of Serbia
- Patriarchate of Romania
- Church of Cyprus
- Church of Greece

- Church of Poland
- Church of Albania
- Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia

As this article demonstrates, the Council of Crete officially adopted certain documents of the World Council of Churches, including the Toronto Statement, which incorporates many elements of the heretical branch theory. Below is a list of all the Orthodox churches that are members of the World Council of Churches and have adopted these heretical documents, even if some of them did not participate in the False Council of Crete in 2016.


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Church of Cyprus
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1948

Church of Greece
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1948

Ecumenical Patriarchate
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1948

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1948

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1948

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1948

Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1994

Orthodox Church in America
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1953

Orthodox Church in Japan
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1973

Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1966

Orthodox Church of Finland
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1982

Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1961

Romanian Orthodox Church
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1961

Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1961

Serbian Orthodox Church
Orthodox churches (Eastern)
WCC Member Since : 1965

Ecclesiological Implications of the Approval of the Heretical Document The Toronto Statement by the Pseudo-Council of Crete

Argument

After the Council of Crete, the defenders of the “Orthodox confession” that this assembly would have made to the whole world tried to demonstrate that there is no reason for the council to be considered heretical, that some controversial decisions were made there, but not so serious as to be incapable of being corrected at another council of the same nature as the one in Kolymbari. An analogy was even made with the Second Ecumenical Council, ignoring the fact that it did not correct serious errors allegedly committed by the First Council, but only developed the correct doctrines of the First Council, which it also reinforced through its first canon.

Most of the arguments were formulated around the expression in Article 6 of the synodal document *The Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, which “admits the historical designation of churches and heterodox confessions,” [1] vehemently criticized by those opposing the Cretan council.

Some pro-synodal arguments have attempted to promote the idea that other official documents of the Church (the documents of the 1484 Synod of Constantinople, the patriarchal encyclical of 1848) also contain references to a certain ecclesiality attributed to Roman Catholics, or that many contemporary theologians use this formulation. This argumentation ignores several aspects:

1. The document of the 15th-century council is one through which the Orthodox Church breaks the artificial connection created with Rome by the uncanonical council of Ferrara-Florence. Held in a context dominated by Turkish supremacy over Orthodox territories and the instability of the patriarchs on the throne of the Great Church of Constantinople—whose appointment and removal depended on the intrigues at the Turkish court—the 1484 council discussed, among other things, the manner of receiving back into Orthodoxy those who lived in territories dominated by Latins and had accepted the Latin supremacy promoted by the council of Ferrara. From the accounts preserved in the documents and by historians, the council primarily referred to Greeks who had accepted Catholic supremacy in territories ruled by Latins. The decision to receive them back solely through chrismation did not imply the acceptance of Catholic baptism or the recognition of papist ecclesiality, and the decision was made at the end of a theological dispute in which there was also an opposing opinion. [2] In the decision taken in 1484, all aspects must be considered: Latin influence, the influence of Ottoman rule, political games, the personal theological opinions of those involved in the process, and the nature of the converts to whom chrismation was applied (most of them being Greeks who wanted to return to the Mother Church after escaping Latin political supremacy). This theological dispute regarding the baptism of heretical converts was resolved by the Oros of 1755, which decided that all who come to Orthodoxy from heretics must be rebaptized. [3] The Oros was strongly contested by papal envoys and by some Enlightenment-inspired metropolitans, contributing to the deposition of the patriarch who promulgated it, which indicates the political atmosphere in which these decisions were made.

2. The 19th-century patriarchal document describes Papism through an analogy with ancient Arianism, foretelling that it will not prevail until the end. [4] It considers filioque a heresy and other papist teachings as innovations, calling papist missionaries “soul traffickers.” In the text, the reference to the “Catholic Church” pertains to the universal Church, not the papist heresy, while the provision regarding the entry of innovations into the “Church of the West” refers to the Western Church before the schism of 1054, when the West was in communion with the Church of Christ. Regarding the canonical primacy of Rome, the encyclical states that it existed as long as the See of Rome “remained pure according to the doctrines of the Holy Fathers, adhering to the infallible rule of Holy Scripture and the holy Councils.” However, after its fall into heresy, “this primacy degenerated from a fraternal and hierarchically privileged see to supremacy.” [5]

3. Even if it were true that those documents referred to Papism with the term “Church,” and even if it were true that at that time Papism possessed certain ecclesial traits, its enormous falls after the mid-19th century—when the First and Second Vatican Councils proclaimed the supremacy and quasi-divine status of the pope, along with other heretical doctrines—render any reference to a past situation irrelevant in the present. This is because it is in the nature of a heresy to diverge, over time, ever further from the truth of the Orthodox faith.

In addressing this matter, the defenders of the Council of Crete encountered the following paradoxical situation: on the one hand, they attempt to demonstrate that Crete followed an older Orthodox line that somewhat recognizes a kind of ecclesiality in Papism and even Protestantism, while on the other hand, it is emphatically stated that the council did not in any way recognize those communities as “churches” but merely performed an “act of courtesy” by acknowledging the reality that they call themselves so.



Opening Session of the False Council

An argument was even constructed suggesting that the mere fact that their designation was recognized means nothing, as it does not imply that it was also affirmed that they are “churches,” as if it were possible to acknowledge the designation of something while denying the reasons that justify that thing having such a designation.

The only stumbling block for all those who positioned themselves in favor of the Council of Crete was the reality that Article 19 of the document on relations with the rest of the Christian world accepted the Toronto Statement, whose ecclesiological premises were considered of paramount importance for the participation of Orthodox Churches in the World Council of Churches. Most opinions of the council’s apologists converge on the idea that only the ecclesiological premises cited in the text were accepted on that occasion, without, however, being able to explain:

1. How is it that the wording in the text uses an undefined plural, which implies that all the ecclesiological premises of that document are acceptable and vital?
2. Why were four favorable opinions selected from a text that, as a whole, is entirely heretical?
3. Why was it not specified that the Orthodox Churches consider the rest of the premises in the Statement heretical and condemn them?

In this study, we aim to demonstrate that the key to understanding the heretical nature of the Council of Crete lies in its acceptance of the Toronto Statement. All the decisions included by the council in the document *The Relations of the Orthodox Churches with the Rest of the Christian World* are in the spirit of this heretical ecumenist statement and must be understood through its lens.

What is the Toronto Statement?

In 1950, two years after the first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, the Central Committee of the WCC drafted a statement that entered history under the name *The Toronto Statement*. Alongside the WCC Constitution, the Toronto Statement is considered one of the pillars of the ecumenist movement, sometimes even referred to as the “Magna Carta” of the WCC.

The Toronto Statement was drafted by the WCC secretary Willem Visser 't Hooft, together with his colleague Oliver Tomkins, [6] and is the result of prior consultation with Roman Catholic theologians [7] and some Orthodox theologians, among whom Protopresbyter George Florovsky contributed. The purpose of this statement was to develop a concept of what the World Council of Churches represents and what it is not. The idea underlying this statement was to create a space that would take into account the existing diversity within the Christian sphere, including ecclesiological and dogmatic diversity. As the Russian ecumenist Vitaly Borovoy states, the statement is what created a space for ecclesiological diversity. [8]

In the form in which it was approved, the Toronto Statement attempts to outline some general principles regarding how the WCC should function and relate to its member “churches,” but it also contains a few fundamental principles concerning what the Church is from an ecumenist perspective. This document draws attention through its ambivalent, somewhat schizophrenic language, which generally accompanies any ecumenist document.

The Toronto Statement consists of four parts: an introduction, which links it to the resolution on the “authority of the Church” adopted by the Amsterdam Assembly; an argument advocating the necessity of clarifying the status of the WCC; a section defining what the WCC is not; and a final section defining what the WCC is and, especially, what the Church is from the WCC’s perspective.

What is relevant for the purpose of our study is the fact that the ecumenists have considered, in the name of the Orthodox Church, and continue to consider even today, through the decisions of the Council of Crete, the Toronto Statement as essential for Orthodox participation in the WCC.

The reason for such an attitude lies in what theologians call the “negative language” of the document, namely the section that states what the WCC is not. This section contains certain principles that Orthodox participants in the ecumenist dialogue consider sufficient to guarantee the participation of the Orthodox Church in this dialogue without being compelled to make concessions regarding Orthodox ecclesiology. Some Protestant theologians involved in the ecumenist dialogue have even criticized the Statement, arguing that by asserting this neutrality of the WCC, it makes too great a concession to the Orthodox, reducing the role of the WCC to that of a mere discussion forum. [9] In practice, however, ecclesiological neutrality has never truly been respected.

“Negative Language”

The main provisions of the Statement [10] concerning what the WCC is not, broadly cited in Article 19 of the synodal document from Crete, The Relationship of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, are as follows:

1. The World Council of Churches is not and should never become a super-church (premise III.1).
2. The purpose of the World Council of Churches is not to negotiate unions between churches, which can only be undertaken by the churches themselves, on their own initiative, but to bring the churches into living contact with one another and to promote the study and discussion of issues related to the unity of the Church (premise III.2).
3. The World Council cannot and should not be based on any particular conception of the Church (premise III.3).
4. Membership in the World Council of Churches does not imply that a church relativizes its own conception of the Church (premise III.4).
5. Membership in the World Council does not imply acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of the Church (premise III.5).
6. The member churches of the World Council consider the relationship of other churches to the Holy Catholic Church, as confessed in the Creeds, to be a subject of mutual consideration. However, membership does not imply that each church must regard the other churches as true and complete churches in the fullest sense of the term (premise IV.4).

All these principles articulated in the Statement appeared to Orthodox theologians participating in the ecumenist dialogue as a strong guarantee for becoming members of the World Council of Churches or for remaining involved in this initiative. This is despite the fact that the rest of the document contains ecclesiological views contrary to Orthodox ecclesiology, thereby contradicting the WCC’s claims of ecclesiological neutrality.

We will further analyze these ecclesiological principles invoked in Crete and demonstrate that, even if we were to disregard the rest of the heretical Toronto Statement, these principles themselves have a heretical content and, through the contradiction in terms contained in their formulation, represent a chimera, not a solid guarantee of a specific behavior within the WCC.

“The WCC is not and will not be a super-church” (Premise III.1)

Orthodox people would like the World Council of Churches to be the cradle of the one Church of the future WCC General Assembly in Canberra, 1991, Future Patriarch Kirill Gundyayev

The most appealing promise for Orthodox theologians was the promise that the WCC would never become a “super-church” and, in principle, would never adopt ecclesial characteristics. However, as early as 1961, upon the approval of the Toronto Statement by the WCC General Assembly in New Delhi, a document titled Report on Unity stated in Article 49: “We are at least able to say that the World Council is not something entirely different from the member churches. It represents the churches in continuous synod” [11] (emphasis added). In other words, the WCC does not constitute itself as a “super-church,” but as the supreme deliberative body of the ecumenist-type “church,” its permanent synod. This idea is reinforced by the blasphemy at the end of the mentioned paragraph, which states: “Many Christians are now aware that the Council is, in a new and unprecedented way, an instrument of the Holy Spirit, through which the will of God for the whole Church and, through the Church, for the entire world is being realized.”

From the Orthodox perspective, synodal governance of the Church is what defines its catholicity (sobornost). By accepting this point of view as a promise that the WCC would not become a super-church, the concept of the WCC’s “sobornost” as the governing body of the “Church of Christ,” as formulated in the New Delhi Statement, was also accepted. If we draw an analogy with the synodal governance of the universal Orthodox Church, in which each local Church is a fully empowered member by virtue of the fullness of grace and the orthodoxy of faith, we can say that the WCC conceives all its participating members in this “continuous synod” as “complete churches,” existing in a full state of grace. Otherwise, how could they participate together in this “synod through which the Holy Spirit speaks”? A practical application of the branch theory.

The Theory of the “Lost Unity of the Church” (Premise III.2)

The second premise outlines the assumed goal of the WCC: to place “churches” in living contact and to promote the study and discussion of issues related to the unity of the Church. It is evident that the “Church” referred to in this WCC premise is not the Orthodox Church but what the document calls the “true Church of Christ,” the “Holy Catholic Church confessed by the Creeds.” From this, it follows that the Orthodox Church, through a heretical decision of a pan-Orthodox council, has committed itself to participating in the realization of the unity of a “Church” other than the Orthodox one, which contradicts the purpose and mission of our Church.

When questioned, Orthodox ecumenists give a terse response that the purpose of our Church’s presence on this heretical platform for religious dialogue is “to bear witness.” The decision of October 26, 2016, by the Synod of the Holy Romanian Orthodox Church states that “the Great and Holy Council bore witness that the Orthodox Church is the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” However, Premise III.2 of the Statement stipulates that “the purpose of the WCC is... to bring the Churches into living contact with one another and to promote the study and discussion of issues related to the unity of the Church.” It speaks of a living contact between “churches,” meaning a very real ecclesial relationship between Orthodox and heretics, with the goal of achieving the unity of the Church.

Nowhere in the history of the Orthodox Church is there mention of establishing a living contact between the Church of Christ and heresies. A living contact implies two living entities, which in turn presupposes the recognition by the Orthodox Church of a certain ecclesiality in the dialogue partners.

We cannot understand the ecumenist concept of “studying and discussing issues related to the unity of the Church” without connecting it to other premises of the Statement, which reveal the WCC’s conception of the “Church of Christ,” on the one hand, and the “member churches,” on the other.

Thus, by subscribing to the WCC’s goal of “studying and discussing issues related to the unity of the Church,” the Council of Crete implicitly accepts that “the member churches of the Council believe that the conversation, cooperation, and common witness of the churches must be based on the mutual recognition that Christ is the Divine Head of the Body” (Premise IV.1). This premise asserts that Christ is the Head of all denominations claiming Christian identity, which, in turn, would be parts of the Body whose Head is Christ. The Statement supports this heretical idea based on a statement by an Orthodox delegation at the ecumenist meeting in Edinburgh in 1937, which stated: “Despite all the differences that exist among us, our common Lord and Master is One – Jesus Christ, who will lead us to increasingly closer collaboration for the building up of the Body of Christ.” The idea that Christ is the Head of all heresies is a blasphemy that Orthodox participants in the ecumenist dialogue overlook—or, even worse, some of them actually believe.

From this heretical idea, all other ecumenist conceptions about the nature of the Church can arise, because if we accept that Christ is the Head of all Christian communities, then all of them become scattered members of the same Body. In reality, however, Christ is only the Head of the Orthodox Church; all other heresies are severed from the Body of the Church, whose Head is Christ. Premise IV.1 states in its commentary that “no relationship among the member churches can have substance or promise anything unless it begins with the shared submission of the churches to the Head, Who is Christ, in the Church.” The idea that Christ is the Head of all “churches” would obligate them “to enter into a real and close relationship with one another.” Although it is suggested that participation in ecumenist dialogues is strictly a matter of bearing witness, Orthodox ecumenists accept entering into a “real and close relationship” with heresies, which they consider part of the Church of Christ. The goal of the WCC remains the realization of the visible unity of the Church by harmonizing the “differences” that exist among those who “submit to Christ as Head.”

Another premise, seemingly correct, is: “The member churches of the World Council believe, based on the New Testament, that the Church of Christ is one” (Premise IV.2). The premise is seemingly correct because, in itself, it is true: the Church of Christ is indeed one. However, the testimony of the New Testament is also reinforced by the Holy Tradition of the Church, especially by the apologetic and canonical writings, which very clearly delineate the boundary between the Church and heresy. Regarding Holy Tradition, in a manner reminiscent of sola Scriptura, the premise says nothing. The explanation of this premise addresses the discrepancy between the New Testament affirmation that the Church is one and the reality that “there are so many churches claiming to be churches of Christ, but they do not live in unity with one another.”

In reality, however, the Church is One, as described in the New Testament and confessed by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and it is solely the Orthodox Church. Outside of it, there exist only heresies and schisms. It cannot be said that there are multiple “churches” claiming to be “churches of Christ,” nor can there be talk of “a simple Christian duty to do everything to manifest the Church in its uniqueness,” as the explanation of the premise states, in the sense that the Church of Christ would also include heresies and schisms outside of it.

Lastly, to understand how the WCC intends to fulfill its goal of studying and discussing matters concerning the unity of the Church, we must consider an extremely controversial premise: “The member churches of the World Council recognize in other churches elements of the true Church. They believe that this mutual recognition obliges them to enter into a very serious conversation, with the hope that those elements of truth will lead them to the recognition of the whole truth and to unity based on full truth” (Premise IV.5).



This premise, inspired by Protestant theology regarding the “signs that indicate the unity of the Church,” considers these elements to be: the preaching of the Word, the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, and the administration of the Sacraments. From the perspective of Orthodox doctrine, there can be no preaching of the Word outside the Church, as heresies emerged in history precisely as a result of preaching teachings other than the life-giving Word. The teaching of the Holy Scriptures, in the Orthodox Church, is carried out in the light of Holy Tradition, that is, patristic thought, not based on “personal revelations,” as often occurs in the Protestant world, for example. Apostolic Canons 45 and 46, along with many others, make it clear that outside the Orthodox Church, there can be no administration of the Sacraments, as the Sacraments convey the divine Grace necessary for salvation, while heresies and schisms are severed from divine Grace. Moreover, the Catholic or Protestant conception of the created nature of Grace results in the “sacraments” they practice transmitting something other than divine Grace.

The idea that revealed truth is dispersed among the various self-proclaimed Christian confessions is foreign to the Orthodox Church, which is the depository of the entire revealed truth, as it was given by the Savior, preached by the apostles, and preserved by the Church from their time to the present day. “The full truth” cannot be recognized by pooling “confessional truths” but rather by removing from divine Revelation all human inventions introduced into the lives of those who have separated from Orthodoxy through heresy and schism.

Premise IV.6: “The member churches of the Council are willing to consult together to try to discern from the Lord Jesus Christ what witness He wants them to bear to the world in His name” postulates nothing less than the joint witness of Christ before the world by the Orthodox Church alongside heresies and schisms. The explanation of this premise speaks again of the “common Lord” and also of “a common witness” before the world. Although it is not always possible for “churches” to bear common witness, the Statement states that when they meet, “the churches can gratefully accept [to bear common witness], as a gracious gift from God, that, despite their divisions, He has enabled them to bear one and the same witness.”

Another premise, directly related to the previous ones, is Premise V.8: “The member churches enter into a spiritual relationship in which they seek to learn from one another and to offer mutual support, so that the Body of Christ may be built up and church life renewed.”

The premises contain several ideas dangerous to Orthodox ecclesiology:

- It reaffirms that Orthodoxy enters into a spiritual relationship with heresies.
- It asserts that within this “spiritual relationship,” the Orthodox Church learns from heresies.
- It proclaims the blasphemy that the Body of Christ is built up within the relationship between Orthodoxy and heresies.
- It promotes the idea of an aggiornamento of church life.

This is also discussed in the previous premise. Both contain the idea of cooperation on certain aspects of church life, which are subject to evolution and change, particularly in practical matters and issues faced by all Christian communities. The danger of this premise lies in the postulation of practical cooperation between Orthodox Christians and heretics, with catastrophic effects on the Orthodox dogmatic consciousness.

The World Council of Churches has two branches: a “theological” one, called Faith and Order, praised in the document from the Council of Crete, and a “diaconal” one, Life and Work. The theological commission is tasked with drafting ecumenical theological documents meant to “build up the Body of Christ” from a theological perspective, while Life and Work is tasked with dulling confessional consciousness by involving Orthodox and heretics in joint projects, as also postulated by the documents of the Council of Crete, on social, economic, and ecological issues. The practical branch of the WCC has so far achieved much more than the theological one, creating, at least within the Orthodox mindset, the impression that collaboration with heretics poses no canonical problems and that dogmatic divergences are mere theological speculations, insignificant for good cooperation with heretics and for achieving the much-desired “unity of the Church.”

The WCC is modeled after the European Union by the same strategists who designed the union. The denationalization of European peoples was not achieved through great philosophies and common ideals but by opening the borders of wealthy countries to poorer ones and creating the illusion of a “better life” for the needy. The same model is applied on a religious level by the WCC.

“Ecclesiological Neutrality” (Premise III.3)

Premise III.3: “The World Council cannot and must not be based on any particular conception of the Church” is contradicted by the text of the Statement itself. The Toronto Statement is structured around two themes: what the WCC is and is not, and what the “Church of Christ” is, which the WCC seeks to realize. It is true that, at a declarative level, the WCC proclaims its ecclesiological neutrality, but it is self-evident that a dialogue platform aiming at the unity of the Church must have an idea about this Church. Otherwise, how could it achieve this unity?

The Toronto Statement abounds in ecclesiological statements, most of them assumed to be common to the Protestant majority among the Council's members. What else but ecclesiological principles are the following statements: "the mutual recognition that Christ is the divine Head of the Church" (Premise IV.1); "the member churches believe... that the Church of Christ is one" (Premise IV.2); "the member churches recognize that membership in the Church of Christ is broader than membership in their own church" (IV.3); "the member churches of the World Council recognize in other churches elements of the true Church" (Premise IV.5)?

Despite its declared aim of ecclesiological neutrality, the WCC actually bases its premises on the most well-known Protestant ecclesiological conceptions: the branch theory, the baptismal theory, the signs theory, the traditions theory, and the theory of "incomplete churches."

"Unity in Diversity of Evangelical Expression" (Premises III.4, III.5)

Premises III.4 and III.5 state that no member "church" of the WCC is required to relativize its own ecclesiological doctrine and that membership in the World Council does not imply the acceptance of a specific ecclesiology. If these two premises were genuine, they would seemingly invalidate the WCC's ultimate goal: the unification of all in the "Church of Christ," which would bear common witness to Christ in the world. Moreover, if none of the WCC members are obligated to relativize their own ecclesiology, then the Orthodox confession that the Orthodox Church is the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church has no chance of ever becoming the official doctrine of all Christianity—a *sine qua non* condition for achieving the much-desired Christian unity, as acknowledged by one of the movement's proponents, Professor John Meyendorff. [12] The question arises: what, then, is the purpose of Orthodox participation in the WCC? The even graver question is this: if this principle guarantees the preservation of each participant's eschatological vision, how is it that the Orthodox Churches participating in Crete chose to modify their own ecclesiology, even though no one compelled them to do so?

Adhering to this ecclesiological principle would mean, from the outset, condemning the WCC to forever remain a mere forum for discussions—a criticism made by many participants in this dialogue. The only solution to this impasse would be the acceptance of the Protestant principle of treating theological differences among various confessions as mere traditions that do not, in any way, impede the "unity of Christians."

This was also noted by Roman Catholic theologians, active participants in drafting the Statement: "Even though each Church was able to preserve its own ecclesiological conception, as stated in the Toronto Statement of 1950, the WCC could define itself as a Council of Churches precisely based on this conviction: that each community of believers who have faith can be recognized as a Church, called to meet with others while still preserving its own identity and, within certain limits, even its own diversity." [13] From this perspective, "the attitude the WCC imposes upon itself is one of reconciliation only, of restoring the fullness of visible communion, which arises from participation in the unique Eucharist, not of reducing diversity, insofar as it involves different understandings and developments of the Christian faith achieved under the action of the Holy Spirit, not errors" (emphasis added). [14]

This Roman Catholic analysis of the WCC's principle of ecclesiological neutrality suggests a *koinonia* (fellowship) of "churches" moving toward "the fullness of a visible communion that arises from participation in the unique Eucharist," under the premise that "each community of Christians... can be recognized as a Church," preserving its own identity and even diversity. Participation in the unique Eucharist under conditions of doctrinal diversity is unacceptable from the perspective of Orthodox doctrine. However, it poses no issue for Protestant communities or even for Roman Catholicism and is the only framework through which the WCC can promote the realization of "Christian unity" under conditions of doctrinal neutrality.

The principle was implemented, and at Porto Alegre in 2006, it was established that interconfessional differences should be understood as “varieties of evangelical expression that enrich common life”: “The variety of evangelical expression, of word and deed, enriches common life. Different forms of expression are present today in the life and witness of the various Churches. For example, the tradition of holiness among Methodists, the doctrine of reward for faith and grace among Lutherans, life in the Holy Spirit among Pentecostals, the primacy in the service of unity of the Roman Catholic Church, intrinsic value in Anglican society, and the doctrine of deification correlated with that of ‘synergy’ among the Orthodox. To what extent do the emphasized points constitute contradictory attitudes or expressions of legitimate variety? The focus on certain issues overshadows the fullness of the Gospel message.” [15]

The idea is also present at the local level, in the ecumenist relations between local “churches.” Here is how a Protestant representative understands the “common prayer for the unity of Christians” in Romania: “In Romania, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession calls on other churches and Christians to leave behind the ‘old human things’ that separate us, to be evangelical, that is, faithful to the Gospel of Christ, to reform ourselves, that is, to renew our faith in one Savior Christ, to become Orthodox, that is, to be Christians with right faith and deeds, to become Catholic, that is, to realize that faith is universal and shared with many others, and to be Protestant, where the truth is trampled underfoot” (emphasis added). [16]

The fact that ecclesiological neutrality has not been respected—and could not be respected, as long as the WCC seeks the “full visible unity of the Church”—is evident from the statements of the most recent WCC General Assembly in Busan, South Korea: “Faithful to our common calling, we will seek together the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, as we express unity around the same Lord’s Table. Seeking the unity of the Church, we will open ourselves to receive the gifts of each other’s traditions and offer our own gifts to one another...” (emphasis added). [17] The method of achieving this unity is dogmatic minimalism, transforming the significant theological deviations of heretical ideologies into mere “traditions,” which WCC members accept as “gifts” of the “Spirit.” According to five Greek bishops who denounced the statements of Busan, on that occasion, the Orthodox Church was asked to apologize for the division within the Christian world: “At the World Council of Churches—or rather, the Council of Heresies—which met in Busan, South Korea, positions contrary to Orthodox ecclesiology were formulated. The Orthodox Church was asked to apologize for the state of division in which the Christian world finds itself, the infallibility of our Church was called into question, and the Protestant doctrine of the invisible ecclesiological unity of the Church, which is allegedly ‘multi-dogmatic,’ was proclaimed...” [18]

The Entry of Local Churches Into the Heretical World Council of Churches

The assertion that no “Church” is required to relativize its own ecclesiology within the WCC, combined with the establishment of the goal that visible unity is the WCC’s sole purpose, could only lead to this vision of “multi-dogmatism” and “evangelical variety.”

The principle that WCC members are not required to alter their eschatological vision encapsulates the essence of the Church unity postulated by the WCC: this unity is not based on rediscovering the truth of Christ proclaimed by the Orthodox Church to the world, but on the federative idea of achieving religious unity modeled on “unity in diversity,” even dogmatic diversity. Under this model, all forms of religious expression are equally true and valid, and the principle of mutual acceptance replaces the necessity of unity in Truth, which is essential for salvation.

The pressing question is: after witnessing the WCC’s clearly expressed tendencies at Busan, and after having repeatedly been forced to protest against manifestations of intercommunion within the WCC (such as the “Lima Liturgy,” etc.), how was it possible for the Orthodox hierarchs in Crete to still believe in this outdated promise of ecclesiological neutrality and to legislate it through a decision at such a level?

The Theory of “Incomplete Churches” (Premise IV.4)

The last of the premises that the Orthodox Churches participating in the Council of Crete consider “of paramount importance for participation in the WCC” is Premise IV.4: “The member churches of the World Council consider the relationship of other churches with the Holy Catholic Church, as confessed in the Creeds, as a subject of mutual consideration. However, membership does not imply that each church must regard the other churches in the true and full sense of the word.” The latter part of this premise was deemed by Orthodox ecumenist theologians in the 1960s to be sufficient to guarantee that the Orthodox Church, by participating in the ecumenist movement, would not be compelled to recognize other participants as “churches in the true sense of the word.”

The explanation provided by the Statement for this ecclesiological premise contains two heretical ideas that Orthodox ecumenist theologians do not seem to have considered particularly grave. First, it states that despite “doctrinal and canonical differences,” the WCC members recognize one another as serving the same Lord. This heretical idea is refuted by patristic theology, according to which there can be no doubt that “the Catholic (universal) Church is the assembly of the right-believing who confess the Orthodox faith,” [19] while heretics are deceived by demons and worship them: “The enemy... seeing his idols abandoned and, due to the immense multitude of the faithful, his abodes and temples empty, devised a new deception, that under His very Name he might deceive the unwary. He invented heresies and schisms, by which to overturn the faith, corrupt the truth, and tear apart unity. Those whom he can hold in the blindness of the old way, he entices and deceives; leading them astray on a new path, he snatches people even from the Church. And while they believe they have drawn near to the light and escaped the darkness of the world, unknowingly he casts darkness over them again. And although they do not abide in the Gospel of Christ and His law, they call themselves Christians and, walking in darkness, believe they have the light.” [20]

The second heretical statement is the blasphemy that “[the WCC members] trust that they could be led by the Holy Spirit to manifest their unity in Christ,” as a result of harmonizing their differences. The idea that the Holy Spirit would guide efforts to bring Orthodoxy and cacodoxy closer together on the ecumenist principles of the Toronto Statement is echoed in Article 18 of the synodal document from Crete, *The Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*: “The Holy Spirit, Who constitutes the entire institution of the Church, will fulfill what is lacking.” As noted earlier, the 1961 General Assembly in New Delhi defined the WCC as the instrument through which the Holy Spirit manifests God’s will to the entire “Church” and even to the whole world.

To these heretical ideas is added the statement: “these divided churches, even if they do not yet accept one another as true and pure churches...,” which shows that Premise IV.4 is a transitional phase in the process of integrating the participating communities into what the WCC calls the “True Church.”

Premise IV.4 must be directly connected to the previous premise, IV.3, which is the most scandalous from the perspective of Orthodox theology: “The member churches of the World Council of Churches recognize that membership in the Church of Christ is broader than membership in their own ecclesial body. For this reason, they seek to enter into living contact with those outside their own community who confess that Christ is Lord.” The explanation of this premise retains the idea that “all Christian churches, including the Church of Rome, affirm that there is no complete identity between membership in the Universal Church and membership in their own church. They recognize that there are members of the Church extra muros [outside the walls of the Church], that these belong aliquo modo [in some way] to the Church, and even that there is an ecclesia extra ecclesiam [church outside the Church]. This recognition finds expression in the fact that, with very few exceptions, Christian churches accept baptism administered by other churches as valid.”

This heretical idea is complemented by the explanation that, within the ecumenist movement, each “church” has a positive role to play and a mission to fulfill: to seek communion with all those who, although not members of the same visible body, belong to the same mystical body. The theology of a mystical, invisible unity is a specifically Protestant ecclesiological vision, which the Statement adopts despite the promise in Premise III.3 that the WCC does not impose any ecclesiological vision.

Premise IV.4 deserves further elaboration because it forms the backbone of the ecumenist endeavor and was accepted by Orthodox ecumenist theologians, despite the fact that, among all WCC participants, Orthodoxy is the only one that does not share this ecclesiology.

The Second Vatican Council adopted the principle known in Roman Catholic theology as *subsistit in*, which states: “The Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church.” This concept replaced the assertion that “The Church of Jesus Christ is the Roman Catholic Church,” [21] allowing for the claim that, outside the [Catholic] Church, there are not only abandoned Christians but also “elements of the Church” and even “Churches and communities which, although not in full communion, rightfully belong to the One Church and are, for their members, means of salvation.” [22] Through this terminological clarification, the Second Vatican Council establishes “a concrete place” for the Church of Christ, and that place is in the Church of Rome. The Church of Christ is concretely found in the Church of Rome. However, the Council acknowledges the “active presence” of the One Church of Christ in other Churches and ecclesial communities (according to the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*), even if they are not yet in full communion with it.

This concept, adopted by the Second Vatican Council as an ecclesiological line of thought, is known in theology as the “theory of incomplete churches.” It was derived from the Protestant theological thinking of Jean Calvin, who spoke of “remnants of the true Church.” The “theory of incomplete churches” asserts that Christ does not refuse to use other “churches” as instruments of salvation, [23] that the grace of God operates within these communities and is communicated through these instruments of salvation. However, the effectiveness of the actions of grace depends on the connection of these “churches” to the Catholic Church, which possesses the “fullness of grace and truth.” From this perspective, the Catholic Church is the only “complete church,” while the others are incomplete, even though “the Church of Christ exists, in an imperfect form and to varying degrees,” outside the Catholic Church.

Despite differing views on the “location of the Church of Christ,” Protestant and Roman Catholic theology of “incomplete churches” converge in the Toronto Statement. This document accepts that WCC members do not necessarily need to recognize one another as “churches” in the true and full sense of the word but should acknowledge the existence of certain elements of the “true Church” in other WCC members and the fact that Christ is the Head of all of them. It also recognizes that mutual acknowledgment of baptism is the key to affirming the existence of the Church outside the Church. Roman Catholicism aspires for all “sister churches” to return to communion with a renewed and more Catholic Church of Rome. [24] Meanwhile, the ecumenist vision of what the “Church of Christ” should be is more centered on a federative idea, achieved through a union in dogmatic diversity, though it does not exclude the possibility of communion with the Church of Rome.

The Betrayers of Holy Orthodoxy

It is astonishing that the Orthodox Churches accepted this theory of “incomplete churches” and enshrined it in the document on the Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, both through the “admission of the historical name of churches” (which, in the pre-synodal draft of the document, was phrased as “recognizes the historical existence of churches” [25] but was replaced in the final version with a softened formula rooted in the same concept of varying degrees of ecclesiality granted to heresies, as found in Article 6) and through the argumentation of this recognition based on the second part of Premise IV.4. This addition was included in the final document, whereas it was not cited in the pre-synodal version. The distinction made in Article 6 between “churches” and “confessions” (a distinction absent from ecumenical documents, where the branch theory is employed) suggests that the document considers some heresies more deserving of being called “churches,” while others are not. (Various heresies are invariably referred to as “churches,” so this distinction reflects the perspective of the ecumenist participants in Crete on the confessional landscape). Or, as articulated in Article 4 of the document on relations with the Christian world, the Church “has always cultivated dialogue with those who have separated from it,” some of whom are “closer,” while others are “farther,” precisely in line with the theory of “incomplete churches.” This theory is foreign to patristic thought, which holds that all heresies are outside the Church, not closer or farther.

Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythira wrote a letter to the Patriarch of Georgia in which he provided an analysis suggesting that Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon is attempting to impose the theory of “incomplete churches” within the Orthodox sphere, relating these to the Orthodox Church. [26] From this perspective, the ease with which heresies have been granted a “sociological” [27] status as “churches” becomes understandable. Even the assertion that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church takes on a new meaning, as, following the logic employed by Roman Catholicism, this does not in any way preclude the coexistence of the Orthodox Church with other “churches.”

Relating “incomplete churches” to the Orthodox Church is no less heretical than relating them to Roman Catholicism, as, from the perspective of Orthodox ecclesiology, outside the Orthodox Church there exist only heresies and schisms. Even if one begins with the truth that the Orthodox Church is the only complete Church or even with the idea, formulated in a Catholic-like manner, that “the Church of Christ subsists in the Orthodox Church,” it cannot be admitted that there is Church outside the Church. From the perspective of Roman Catholic or Protestant ecclesiological reality, the idea that there is a “Church outside the Church,” as they claim, is more of an instinctive self-recognition of the non-ecclesial character of these communities. A more accurate formulation for them would be that the [Orthodox] Church of Christ exists entirely outside their “churches.” However, Orthodoxy cannot adopt such concepts, which contradict the Holy Canons and the thought of the Holy Fathers.

An important aspect of this theory of “incomplete churches” and the idea that there is a “church outside the Church” is the recognition of the validity of baptism administered by other “churches.” The theory of “incomplete churches” and the “branch theory” rely heavily on another heretical theory, the “baptismal theory,” promoted within the Orthodox sphere by Metropolitan John Zizioulas and Protopresbyter George Florovsky, the latter being a “consultant” involved in drafting the Toronto Statement. According to this theory, the Church of Christ extends wherever a baptism has been administered. The boundaries of the Church of Christ are the boundaries of baptism. More specifically, outside the Church are only those who have not received any kind of baptism. This idea places Orthodox Baptism on the same level as baptism administered by heretical communities.

Until recently, the Orthodox Church practiced a certain *oikonomia* concerning the recognition of Baptism performed by heretics, taking into account the correct form of the administered Baptism and, above all, the necessity of salvation for the person coming to Baptism. As a rule, however, following the Holy Canons, the Church did not recognize the baptism of heretics. A testimony to this is the Definition of the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church from 1775, which stipulates that only Orthodox Baptism is valid, while others are not performed according to the evangelical command of the Lord and the canonical provisions in this regard. [28]

Since the Orthodox Churches have been practicing ecumenism, *oikonomia* has become the rule, and baptism performed within heresies or schisms that use the baptismal formula “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” is recognized, even though those heresies generally have an incorrect conception of the Holy Trinity.

In a note by Father Professor Ioan N. Floca on Apostolic Canon 68, the Romanian canonist states: “With regard to schismatics, particularly Roman Catholics and those belonging to the heterodox Churches of the East, ecclesiastical practice has established that both their baptism and ordination are to be recognized as valid” (emphasis added). [29]

From this quote, we first observe that Roman Catholics and those from the “heterodox churches of the East” are not considered heretics but schismatics. Secondly, the recognition of Catholic ordinations and baptisms has been established through “ecclesiastical practice,” without specifying whether this occurred primarily in recent times, since the Orthodox Church has been engaged in the “dialogue of love” with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

The reason why the baptisms of heretics are generally accepted by “ecclesiastical practice” is the claimed performance of them in the name of the Most Holy Trinity—of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the case of heretics, however, it is crucial to consider what they understand by the Most Holy Trinity, given that most heresies and schisms are rooted precisely in a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity. This is evident from the formulation of Canon 47 of St. Basil the Great, where, in referring to the Encratites, Saccofori, and Apotactites, the author categorically demands their rebaptism: “Lest they say, ‘We are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ when they consider God to be the author of evil, surpassing Marcion and the other heresies.” [30]

From this canon, it follows that the mere utterance of the names of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity is not sufficient for the validity of Baptism; correct faith in the Most Holy Trinity is absolutely necessary.

The recommendation of Canon 47 of St. Basil was adopted by Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council, which established which types of heretics could be chrismated and which needed to be rebaptized. Among those who must be rebaptized are the adherents of the Eunomian heresy, who practiced a single immersion and taught that the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father and the Son, being a mere creature. [31] The striking similarities with Roman Catholic doctrine prompted Orthodox ecclesiastical practice to apply to the Papists the same treatment regarding Baptism as Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council applied to the Eunomians [32]—rebaptism. The “ecclesiastical practice” by which their baptism was recognized aligns primarily with the agreements from Balamand, where ecumenist representatives of Orthodoxy recognized the “sisterhood” of the “Roman Catholic Church” and, implicitly, the sacraments of Baptism and Priesthood, which are absolutely necessary for considering this heresy as a “church.”

Regarding Protestant “baptism,” the situation is even simpler, given Protestantism’s unequivocal rejection of priesthood, which means that Protestant baptism is effectively performed by no one. This situation is not, in itself, different from that in Roman Catholicism, because where there is no valid baptism, how can there be valid priesthood? Or, as the Synod of Carthage in 256 states: “The admission of the baptism of heretics and schismatics also implies the acknowledgment of those baptized by them. For it cannot be valid in part: if they could baptize, they could also bestow the Holy Spirit; if they could not, because they are outside the Church, they do not have the Holy Spirit and cannot baptize those who come, for baptism is one, and the Holy Spirit is one, and the Church established by Christ our Lord is one, since from the beginning the Apostle Peter said that it is founded on unity; therefore, the things done by them are false and vain, and all are without value.” (emphasis added). [33]

Regarding the relationship between recognizing a valid baptism and attributing ecclesiality to heretics, this is also addressed by the single canon issued by the Synod of Carthage held in 256 during the time of Saint Cyprian: “For the very question asked at baptism is evidence of the truth: for when they say to the one being examined, ‘Do you believe that you receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life?’ they say nothing else but that this can be given in the Catholic Church. From heretics, where there is no Church, it is impossible to receive the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, the defenders of heretics must either change the question or defend the truth unless they wish to also attribute a Church to those whom they claim have baptism.” (emphasis added). [34] This is precisely what was done in Crete by those engaged in “dialogue and cooperation” with heretics.

The acceptance of premise IV.4 contains within itself another trap, as by accepting the idea that no participant in the WCC is obligated to recognize the other members as “churches in the true and full sense of the word,” the unique character of the Orthodox Church within this religious framework has been relativized. If the Orthodox Church has the right not to consider as Churches, in the full and true sense of the word, the WCC members that do not meet the Orthodox ecclesiological criteria to be considered “Churches,” why wouldn’t the other participants have the same right regarding the Orthodox Church? This is evident from the statement of the five Greek bishops who contested the assembly in Busan, revealing that on that occasion, “the infallibility of our Church was called into question.” [35]

By recognizing this principle, the Orthodox Churches made a counter-confession of faith, allowing all WCC members to judge the ecclesial nature of Orthodoxy according to their own ecclesiological criteria and even to reject it if it does not align with them. Roman Catholicism has safeguarded its claim to being “the only complete Church in which the Church of Christ subsists” by refraining from full membership in the WCC, precisely to avoid the relativism that the Toronto Statement would impose. Instead, Rome collaborates effectively with WCC departments dealing with doctrine and practical activities, ensuring a Catholic presence within this Council.

The Ratification of the Statement by the Council of Crete

The analysis of the four premises cited by the Council of Crete from the Statement, deemed of paramount importance for the participation of the Orthodox Churches in the WCC, reveals several essential points:

1. The four premises cited by the Council of Crete cannot be separated from the context of the entire Statement and cannot be accepted in isolation from the rest.
2. Contrary to what Orthodox ecumenists participating in the WCC believe, the four premises provide no real guarantees that the WCC will remain merely a “catalyst” for ecumenical dialogue and will not evolve into a kind of super-church.
3. The premises cited by the Council of Crete are heretical, as they share the same spirit as the rest of the document.

Over the decades since the adoption of the Statement, relationships within the WCC have progressed toward a goal contrary to the one so strongly stipulated in premise III.1, upon which Orthodox ecumenists have built their participation in the WCC for decades. The need to overcome the “ecclesiological neutrality” of the Statement was demanded as early as the years immediately following its adoption by Protestant members, who did not join the WCC merely to engage in dialogue with the Orthodox but to achieve that communion which they regard as the “unity of the Church.”

The text Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry (BEM) from 1982, also known as the “Lima text,” sought to create a foundation for liturgical and doctrinal rapprochement among the WCC members, aiming to achieve the much-desired unity. In the years following the adoption of these texts, the “Lima Liturgy” emerged—a service of ecumenical worship where participation was not mandatory but was recognized as an opportunity for many “churches” to enter into Eucharistic communion. At that point, the participating Orthodox Churches realized that the principles they so valued from the Statement had been surpassed and objected to violations of both the principle that the WCC would not become a “super-church” and the principle of retaining the possibility of not recognizing other participants as “churches in the true and full sense of the word.” [36] This objection provoked dissatisfaction among some Protestant denominations, which refused to take a step back from the union achieved up to that point. The difference in vision between Orthodoxy and Protestantism regarding the Eucharist remains as significant as it was before ecumenical dialogues: Orthodoxy sees communion as a visible sign of the Church’s unity, whereas Protestants view it as a means of achieving that unity. [37] Although Orthodox Churches officially rejected intercommunion, Protestant-style “Eucharistic hospitality” found supporters in certain Orthodox Churches, particularly in the diaspora, where cases have been observed of heretics being admitted to Communion alongside Orthodox believers.

The WCC’s intention to acquire ecclesiological traits is somewhat expected, given that the visible unity envisioned by ecumenists must take on a form. The idea of all heretics returning to Orthodoxy is an illusion that Orthodox ecumenists present to us, the faithful, to make participation in ecumenism more acceptable. As the Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff acknowledged, “The Orthodox Church has failed to convert all other Christians to the one Church of Christ.” (emphasis added) [38] Meyendorff attributes this failure of the Church’s mission to “the inability of the Orthodox Church to express the message in an effective manner, with enough love to make the harsh truth acceptable to all those who do not know it.” [39] The Thessaloniki Statement of 1998 offers different reasons: “After a century of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement and years spent within the WCC, we do not observe sufficient progress in the multilateral theological discussions among Christians. On the contrary, the gap between Orthodox and Protestants is becoming increasingly wide, while the aforementioned tendencies [40] within certain Protestant denominations are growing stronger.” (Emphasis added.) [41]

A very significant reason why Orthodoxy has failed to convince all participants in the ecumenical dialogue to renounce their heresy and return to Orthodoxy as a precondition for achieving Christian unity, as postulated by Orthodox ecumenist theologians, is the acceptance of the heretical principles upon which the WCC is built, as recorded in the Toronto Statement. Since the entire ecumenical endeavor is not founded on a desire to be in communion with the Truth Who is Christ, but on a strictly human, politically-oriented mindset, the “ecclesiological neutrality” that Orthodox ecumenist theologians consider a shield in the ecumenical dialogue becomes a barrier to the Orthodox witness of the uniqueness of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

The analogy between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the European Union (EU) must be revisited, as both organizations are part of the same globalist plan for the unification of humanity: the WCC aims for a religiously unified humanity, while the EU provides the model for achieving a politically united humanity. Two decades ago, European politicians cautiously addressed the idea of a superstate, carefully considering nationalist sentiments and asserting that “the EU will never become a superstate.” A few decades later, the Lisbon Treaty laid the groundwork for a European superstate, and following Brexit, plans to relinquish national sovereignty in favor of a federal state are now being publicly discussed. Just as the promise that the EU would never become a superstate but merely a communal space for dialogue, the “ecclesiological neutrality” and emphatic assertion in the Toronto Statement that the WCC will never become a “super-church” serve as bait for the Orthodox, offering them a grace period in which to become accustomed to the doctrinal, liturgical, and canonical minimalism underpinning the ecumenical effort to achieve “Christian unity.”

Why Did Orthodox Ecumenist Theologians Accept the Statement?

Anyone studying the Statement is shocked by the fact that Orthodox participants in the ecumenical dialogue accepted those four principles, which were also cited by the Synod of Crete in Article 19 of the document *The Relation of the Orthodox Church to the Rest of the Christian World*, while ignoring the rest of the text, which is entirely heretical, and the fact that those four principles cannot be separated from the context of the entire Statement.

The defenders of the Synod of Crete go to great lengths to assert that Article 19 did not approve all the premises of the Statement, but only the four cited. I have demonstrated that even these four principles, considered “of capital importance for Orthodoxy’s participation in the WCC,” are heretical in nature, encompassing ecclesiological theories completely different from Orthodoxy’s vision of the Church. Moreover, Article 19 of the Synodal document from Crete refers to the premises of the Statement in the plural, not just to the four cited. The pre-synodal version mentioned three principles, and the final version added another, indicating that all the principles are considered acceptable and that only those useful for the argument the document sought to make were mentioned in the text. Neither the theologians of the 1950s nor those of 2016 provided clear clarifications indicating that the Orthodox Churches categorically oppose the other ecclesiological premises included in the rest of the Statement.

A reason why this did not happen is the belief held by some theologians that the principles of the Statement are not as heretical as they appear to those who uphold the Tradition and Canons of the Church. At the Congress of Orthodox Theological Faculties in 1936, there were professors who considered it impossible to convene an ecumenical council in the absence of two-thirds of Christendom. [42] A Bulgarian professor proposed the convocation of a “truly catholic council of the universal Church,” which would include Roman Catholics and Protestants. The Romanian professor Valerian Șesan suggested an ecumenical council that would include “all baptized Christians.” Reading many theological books written over the last century shows that participants in the ecumenist dialogue have long adopted the language of Protestant and Roman Catholic theories, such as the “sister churches,” the “branches,” the “two lungs,” the baptismal theory, and so on.

For this reason, it is not incorrect to consider that the theologians participating in the WCC dialogue on behalf of the Orthodox Churches assent to the other heretical ecclesiological doctrines of the Toronto Statement. However, those who wish to remain Orthodox cannot do so.

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